

CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project – Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT)

A Summary of the Wales CSI-SAT Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide CIVICUS and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index project in Wales. The findings of the evaluation will be used to generate lessons that will inform current and future phases of the project as well as the final global evaluation undertaken by CIVICUS. It is hoped that WCVA will also gain out of this evaluation through the process of self reflection as well as gauging any important lessons learned.

The specific objective of the evaluation is to assess the project's success against the original outcomes and outputs set forth in the planning phase by WCVA. It should be noted that many outcomes will only become visible in the future and therefore will be evaluated in more depth at a later date. Therefore, in this evaluation, planned outcomes have been assessed against any relevant preliminary changes taking place due to the project.

Key Findings

Project Outputs

A body of knowledge on the state of civil society

This output has been mostly achieved whereas both the National Coordinating Organization (NCO) and CIVICUS expressed satisfaction with the final country report. Although this report based itself only secondary literature it presented a comprehensive picture of civil society in Wales.

Shared understanding on the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders

Despite this output being the NCO's priority it was considered to be only somewhat achieved, as it was considered that "engagement with civil society was not as great as it could have been" as major policy makers and key actors were not involved. That said, the opportunity to network and foster exchange between a broad range of stakeholders was pointed out as one of the major strengths of the SAG meetings. The exchanges generated were also considered as "very stimulating". One member of the SAG expressed as a positive element of the project was the opportunity of "meeting people from various sectors, feeling their care and enthusiasm about the different questions", as well as "taking part in a lively discussion with others whose views and insight are diverse."

Improved self-understanding of civil society and better appreciation of its roles

Only a small group of individuals took part in the implementation of the CSI-SAT in Wales, and for those who did, "it proved an eye opener", as WCVA noted. Therefore the NCO perceives that this output was somewhat achieved.

An assessment of civil society's strengths and weaknesses as well as priority areas for policy and action

According to the WCVA, the project provided an assessment of civil society's strengths and weaknesses as well as priority areas for policy and action only somewhat. It was considered that

the CSI-SAT “highlighted some areas which were already known about, but people feel powerless to change things”. It was also considered that the consultative activities within the project did not help to provide a space for civil society (and stakeholders) to debate and share information on issues concerning civil society in Wales as only “a small group of self-selected participants have been involved”. It will however be explored by WCVA how the report and its findings “can be taken forward to develop the debate.”

Outcome

Increase in knowledge-based actions by civil society stakeholders

During the final SAG meeting the action-planning stage was not achieved, which limits the galvanization of knowledge based actions by civil society. The outcome was therefore not at all achieved.

Project Relevance

The CSI overall was considered to be mostly relevant to the WCVA; it was however noted that the project was not “driven from the top” of the organization, which resonates with CIVICUS’ assessment. It is also not clear at this stage from which side how and to what extent the NCO is planning on using the CSI for its own work.

The CSI is considered as only somewhat relevant to civil society strengthening in Wales. It was commented by the NCO that the stakeholders involved did find it useful but did not believe that they would be able to “take the agenda forward”. It was furthermore remarked that the project implementation in Wales did not engage a broad range of stakeholders. As voiced by a member of the SAG: “If the aim is to achieve participation of people at ‘grass roots’ a different strategy should be employed.”

Project Validity

It was considered by both CIVICUS and WCVA that the project methodology generated a mostly accurate assessment of civil society in Wales, and it was estimated that the NCO mostly adhered to the toolkit. CIVICUS’ systems and procedures were considered to be mostly satisfactory; in particular the MoU procedure was referred to as “awkward”, as its necessity was not completely clear. The toolkit was considered to be helpful and detailed, and therefore mostly satisfactory.

Capacity Building

According to WCVA, skills were built only on secondary data gathering.

Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance

The overall support provided by CIVICUS was considered as completely satisfactory. CIVICUS support was prompt, and the CSI training deemed of very high quality. The monthly calls were considered as particularly helpful. CIVICUS on the other hand also considered the feedback provided on the country report to have been particularly effective.

The support rendered by the CSP was also between mostly and completely satisfactory, with WCVA rating it as “encouraging” and ensuring the NCO was heading in “the right direction”. CIVICUS also considered that it was of importance that the NCO was motivated and encouraged throughout to continue implementing the project, despite its challenges.

The overall implementation of the CSI-SAT by WCVA was considered as mostly satisfactory. As a constraint it was mentioned that it was not very clear “how much the CSI was ‘wanted’ by the NCO, and particularly its leadership” and that largely one person from the side of the NCO was charged with implementing the project without receiving much additional support. Given that not

much institutional interest and impetus was invested in the project it was not as widely known among Welsh civil society as it could have been. The potential reasons pinpointed were a) the methodology since WCVA had been part of the pilot phase of the CSI, and b) a “lack of belief that the CSI project could achieve its aim of strengthening civil society”. As a potential solution CIVICUS notes that it could have explored and perhaps reinforced the commitment demonstrated by WCVA’s leadership’s through CIVICUS’ Secretary General.

Sustainability/Replicability

It is recognized that in this sense the project would not be sustainable, and for a full version of the CSI to be implemented in Wales it would have to be “owned” by a larger group of actors, as well as backed by more “political” support. Correspondingly, some SAG members mentioned the necessity of this type of research to be “more widely consulted upon” and represented by a wider range of actors and stakeholders.

Project Resources

The financial resources were considered to be somewhat sufficient, as the project did not stay within the budgeted costs, which were drawn from the core budget for research in Wales. Human resources were considered as mostly adequate, by both CIVICUS and WCVA. CIVICUS was completely satisfied with the work conducted by the CSE, and mostly satisfied by the Project Coordinator’s role. It is of note that, as previously noted, it was recognized by CIVICUS that the project was being implemented principally by one person, which is why in CIVICUS’ view both roles were being fulfilled by one individual. The NCO however also noted the presence of another person that provided feedback on the work and research produced. Time was a concern for the NCO as they started the project relatively late, and was thus considered as mostly adequate. It was however considered as completely sufficient by CIVICUS.

Short/Long Term Impact

At this stage it is considered too early by the WCVA to be able to register any impacts – be it on the organizational level, on media, the government or other institutions.

Conclusion

The findings of the evaluation are largely critical of the project implementation, and rather mixed on the country report as the NCO is characterizing it as too academic to be accessible to a wider audience. Therefore the only output that was considered as mostly achieved was the production of a body of knowledge on the state of civil society. The three remaining outputs – shared understanding among stakeholders as well as improved self-understanding on civil society and the assessment of civil society’s strengths and weaknesses – were all considered to be only somewhat achieved. Not surprisingly, the outcome of knowledge-based actions by civil society stakeholders was at this stage considered not to have been achieved to any extent.

The relevance of the project was not considered substantial, although its significance was rated higher for the NCO as for its importance for civil society strengthening in general. Whilst the project methodology and its validity was assessed positively, some criticism was exercised over the implementation and methodology of the CSI by SAG members. Secondary data gathering was the only element cited with respect to capacity having been built. In general the cooperation between WCVA and CIVICUS was considered positive. Project resources were largely satisfactory, although mostly only one person was implementing the CSI on WCVA’s level. The project in its current form was not considered sustainable. Although many of the stakeholders’ criticism of the project could be addressed by implementing a full CSI it is also clear that with the current level of commitment of WCVA it would not be sustainable.